Week 2: Reference questions; Tools for offering reference and information services.

Reference questions;

Reference questions are queries from users seeking information or assistance from a librarian, which can range from simple directional questions to in-depth research requests. It can also be a user asking a librarian for help in locating specific books or research materials. It is also a user asking how to use a library database or computer. Research question can also be a query that is so specific it requires the librarian to interpret or evaluate information resources to answer it.

Types of references Question/Queries

1. Ready reference questions: This requires brief, factual answers that can be obtained quickly. Examples are such as "Where is Jimmy Carter's Presidential Library?," "Who won the 2014 World Series?," "What is the capital of Nigeria?," or "What countries use the Euro?" can be readily answered using a general reference source.

The librarian may be tempted to tell the user the answer to simple ready reference questions. Yet there's the saying that "Giving a man a fish feeds him for a day while teaching him to fish feeds him for a lifetime" helps to explain the importance of providing instruction when possible. No matter how simple they initially seem, ready reference questions provide the opportunity for teachable moments. Taking into consideration users' needs and willingness to engage in instruction, librarians should lead users through the process of looking up the information rather than simply provide the solution.

Librarians who assist users with ready reference inquiries on a regular basis sometimes choose to create a "ready reference" section of the most commonly used resources either in print or on the library's website to answer quick questions.

Typically, reference section in the library includes a general all-purpose encyclopedia, dictionaries, almanacs, and handbooks.

In recent times ready reference questions have diminished due to the ease of answering basic questions through search engines such as Google. Thus, ready reference remains a cornerstone of information services, and librarians should be poised to provide it at any time.

2. Research questions are more complex, may take much longer to answer, and typically require multiple sources of information. These are often the questions that require the user to consider a variety of sources and viewpoints and to subsequently draw conclusions.

Additionally, they are in-depth questions requiring extended search, use of multiple sources, and critical evaluation. *Examples: "What are the causes of climate change in West Africa?"*

Sometimes questions that initially seem like ready reference questions are found to be far more complex, as previously hidden facets of the user's inquiry are revealed. Here, the variety of possible sources increases with the complexity of users' questions. Librarians should, for example,

guide users in the use of bibliographic sources, databases, and other reference materials. Likewise, users with complex questions may need guidance as to how to find or request the full text of articles for which electronic databases offer only citations, allowing them to move beyond cursory surveys of the literature.

Research questions, especially if users are unable to fully articulate the nature of their queries, require librarians to ask additional questions through the reference interview as a means of understanding the nature of the requests before setting out to help the patrons answer them. The librarian will need to determine how much information is needed, what level of information is needed, and what other sources have already been consulted.

Reference services call for mutual engagement, especially with more complex questions. Reference librarians should never be passive participants, pointing the way to an answer. Instead, they should play the part of dynamic guides, collaborating with users on their search for information and knowledge. The reference librarian may also refer users to other institutions with more specialized materials in the area of their research or offer to call back or e-mail

if additional information is found.

3. *Bibliographic verification:* This requires provision of lists of relevant materials on a specific subject. Example: "Provide books and journal articles on Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria." This is also provided when a user has already obtained the information needed but must verify the sources. Sometimes this service is a matter of fact checking, while on other occasions users may have completed their research but lack full citation information. As researchers increasingly depend on electronic databases for information, compiling and formatting bibliographic citations becomes easier. Verifying and citing material found on webpages is more difficult since the information needed for the citation is not always easy to find.

4. Readers' Advisory Service: *Readers' advisory service*, sometimes considered a type of information service, is the quest to put the right resources in the right reader's hands. While there is no substitute for a librarian's own knowledge or experience, many new technologies serve to make readers' advisory far easier than it was in the past. Many online databases, for example, have functions that automatically recommend other books to those who like a given title. Others have searchable lists of works by type, helping readers match their favorite books to similar material. As always, however, it is important to remember that readers' advisory, like other reference work, is predicated on the interaction between a librarian and a library user. Asking directed questions, listening carefully to the user's responses, and tailoring assistance accordingly are the basis of excellent, truly helpful service.

Successful readers' advisory librarians are skilled at asking users questions that enable them to assist in finding books of interest. Significantly, it is important that they be able to convey their expertise in a friendly and conversational manner.

Truly mastering readers' advisory service requires a great deal of skill and practice.

5.Information Literacy Instruction

Information literacy, formerly often referred to as *user instruction*, may range from showing an individual how to use the library's online catalog and basic print and electronic reference sources to teaching formal classroom sessions about conducting research in the library. The basic component of information literacy includes demonstrating how, when, and why to use various reference sources in an integrated way that will capture the user's attention at a teachable moment.

In today's educational settings, the ease of using electronic resources often results in a failure to teach more traditional research strategies. While finding superficial information has grown easier, in-depth information using specialized resources has become increasingly difficult to find for many students. In the library, too, approaches to instruction may vary.

In any case, all reference librarians must be skilled at helping users find information and answers quickly, and they must be ready to teach users how to use the reference sources that are available. The best reference librarians develop an intuition for when to be information providers and when to be information literacy instructors. In some libraries, only specific, designated librarians are charged with conducting library instruction courses.

Tools for offering reference and information services.

Reference librarians rely on a range of tools such as traditional and moder to guide users to required information. Tools for providing reference and information services include both traditional methods like in-person assistance and digital tools such as email, instant messaging, chat, video conferencing, and online databases. These tools allow for various types of reference, including immediate, real-time help and delayed, more comprehensive responses.

Traditional (Print-Based) Reference Tools

Tool	Description	Examples
Dictionaries	Provide word meanings, pronunciation, and usage	Oxford English Dictionary, Merriam-Webster
Encyclopaedias	Provide background, factual, and general knowledge	Britannica, World Book
Yearbooks & Almanacs	Contain annual statistics, facts, events	Whitaker's Almanack, Statesman's Yearbook

Tool	Description	Examples
Directories	List people, institutions, organizations, contacts	Telephone directory, NUC Directory
Biographical Sources	Provide details about notable individuals	Who's Who in Nigeria
Atlases & Maps	Provide geographical information	Oxford World Atlas
Indexes & Abstracts	Point to journal articles with summaries	African Journals Online Index, CAB Abstracts
Bibliographies	List of publications on a subject	Subject bibliographies in LIS

Electronic/Digital Reference Tools

1. **Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) / WebPAC**
   For locating books and library holdings.

2. **Electronic Databases and Search Engines**

   Academic databases: JSTOR, Scopus, EBSCOHost, PubMed, ScienceDirect

   Search engines: Google, Google Scholar

3. **Digital Libraries and Repositories**

   HINARI, AGORA, Research4Life, DSpace institutional repositories

4. **E-Reference Tools**

   Online dictionaries, encyclopedias, thesauri, e.g., Encyclopedia Britannica Online, Dictionary.com

5. **Social Media Platforms as Reference Tools**

   Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, X (Twitter) for virtual reference and user engagement

ICT Tools for Reference Services

Tool/Technology	Use in Reference Service
Email	Asynchronous reference service communication
Telephone/Hotlines	Real-time reference support

Tool/Technology	Use in Reference Service
Chat and Messaging Apps	Virtual reference (WhatsApp, Telegram, Live Chat)
Video Conferencing Tools	Reference consultations and training (Zoom, Google Meet)
Library Management Systems (LMS)	Manage circulation, cataloging, and reference processes
AI Chatbots & Virtual Assistants	Automated question answering
Ask-a-Librarian Services	Virtual reference platforms integrated on library websites